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An Integrative Hierarchical Monitoring Approach for Detecting and Characterizing CO₂ Releases

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Abstract

An integrative hierarchical monitoring approach is proposed, with the aim of reliably detecting and assessing possible leakages from storage formations into the shallow subsurface. This hierarchical approach - with method developments and applications ranging from remote sensing (infrared spectroscopy, micrometeorology-based flux measurement), to regional measurements (geophysics and chamber based soil CO₂ flux measurement), to local in-situ measurements (Direct Push Technology) - will allow large spatial areas to be consistently covered. The paper introduces a hierarchical monitoring approach applied in the MONACO project and reveals first results from measurements taken at natural analogue sites in the Czech Republic. These results indicate that the hierarchical monitoring approach represents a multidisciplinary modular concept working in different scales and resolutions.

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1. Motivation

Carbon dioxide capture and storage technology (CCS) is considered a crucial part of worldwide efforts to limit global warming by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. CCS could help achieve a large (> 85%) reduction in CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel combustion caused during power generation, industrial processes and synthetic fuel production [1]. Therefore, it has the potential to be used as a “bridging technology”, helping to mitigate carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions until alternative energy sources are more widely available. In the last few years, several CCS research and development projects have been

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initiated, with some governments having even already started to commercially introduce several technologies into practice. However, there are still uncertainties related to the large-scale implementation of this emergent technology, while public perception of geological CO₂ storage in the geosphere remains generally negative, motivated in particular by perceived leakage risks. There is already an EU directive on the geological storage of CO₂ in place which sets environmental rules and liability requirements for the geological storage of CO₂, stipulating that monitoring and verification are key issues to be considered.[2]. Monitoring is required as part of the approval process for underground injection and is necessary to ensure that natural resources (such as groundwater and ecosystems) are protected and that the local population is not exposed to toxic CO₂ concentrations [3]. CCS technology incorporates three important processes: CO₂ capture; compression and transport; and storage in deep (>800 m) saline formations. Besides monitoring the first two processes, the need to detect migration and leakages from storage formations also requires the development and application of effective long term monitoring tools to detect whether any increased CO₂ concentrations are observable in the atmosphere or not, either at ground surface or sub-surface level. Therefore, the main issues for future large-scale industrial application and for broader public acceptance of CCS technology are the development and validation of appropriate technologies to monitor geological CO₂ storage sites during and after operational phases and the availability of an integrated risk assessment strategy [4].

In this paper, we will present some monitoring methods as part of an integrated hierarchical approach; explain the advantages of validating these methods at a natural analogue site with natural CO₂ degassing zones, and outline findings from our first set of validation results.

2. Studying Natural Analogues

There are two ways to provide and subsequently improve efficient techniques available for detecting and monitoring potential CO₂ degassing, firstly by injecting gaseous CO₂ into a shallow aquifer or deeper formations and secondly, performing investigations on sites where large volumes of nearly-pure CO₂ accumulates naturally and/or sites where CO₂ emanates perpetually. Today, many international CCS research programs use the second approach to assess processes associated with the geological storage of anthropogenic carbon dioxide [e.g. 28].

Natural accumulations of relatively pure CO₂ are found all over the world in a range of geological settings, particularly in sedimentary basins, intra-plate volcanic regions and in faulted areas or in quiescent volcanic structures [5]. At natural analogues, where CO₂ releases occur, local focused and diffuse degassing zones can be found that present different geological and hydrological situations in different temporal and spatial scales. These sites provide the opportunity to study processes controlling how leaks may occur, their potential impacts on near-surface ecosystems and on groundwater [6].

In our opinion, the application of monitoring tools at natural analogues is necessary to determine the limits and opportunities of such method combinations for detecting leakages at the surface and to provide data for health, safety and environmental risk assessment [4]. Several natural circumstances or situations represent expected processes at man-made CO₂ storage sites and are described in *Tab.1*.

Natural analogues are the closest approximation of leakage from CO₂ storage and studying these sites can facilitate gathering information about processes leading to CO₂ release into the atmosphere. In addition, studying these natural analogues helps further understand any mechanisms or subsurface characteristics which control CO₂ transport from deeper formations into the subsurface.

Table 1. Observable phenomena at natural analogues and expected processes at man-made sites (after [4])

Observable phenomena at natural analogues	Expected processes at geological storage sites
High CO ₂ concentration and high flux rates as an indicator for CO ₂ releases at preferential pathways such as small vents, mofettes and vent cores	CO ₂ leakage through poor quality or aging injection wells and via abandoned boreholes.
Fluid interaction caused by increased CO ₂ concentration in aquifers	CO ₂ leakage to surface via aquifer outflow, acidification and fluid mobilization effects, remediation, dissolution of carbonate matrices in aquifers
Diffused degassing zones with low flux rates and moderate CO ₂ concentration at geological fault zones and permeable layers	Vulnerability of cap rock due to pressure induced fractures / cracks and diffuse transport to the surface combined with partly high permeable overlying sediments
Fluid – rock interaction along active fault zones as preferential pathways	Long-term alteration effects, inability of cap rock to prevent upward migration due to fracturing and faulting possibly caused by over pressuring
Vegetation anomalies due to CO ₂ migration and release into upper soil horizons and lower atmosphere layers	Ecosystem vitality, influence on vegetation (indicator plants, vitality), microorganisms, animals and human beings

3. MONACO Approach

Developing and ensuring the maximum effectiveness of suitable existing and novel large scale monitoring tools is a key issue in many R&D activities associated with CCS monitoring.

Within the framework of the MONACO project (MONACO=Monitoring approach for geological CO₂ storage sites using a hierarchical observation concept), an integrative hierarchical monitoring concept is proposed, which can reliably detect and assess leakages from storage formations in the shallow subsurface (including aquifers and unsaturated zone) and CO₂ releases into the atmosphere. The proposed hierarchical approach refers to systems that are organized in the shape of a reverse pyramid, with each investigative scale linked to that which directly precedes it. As part of this integrative hierarchical monitoring concept, several methods and technologies from different disciplines (such as chemistry, hydrogeology, and geophysics) will either be combined or used complementary to one another. The MONACO approach (*Fig. 1*) will allow large spatial areas to be consistently covered, for efficient monitoring of increases in spatial and temporal resolutions. Firstly, monitoring methods for large scale application identify areas with higher CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere. Subsequently, meso-scale methods can be employed which investigate subsurface characteristics to detect potential migration pathways at pre-determined sites. Finally, point measurements enable high resolution investigations to take place at focal points. In-situ permanent monitoring in the shallow subsurface should be carried out to quantify the extent of any leakages and their resultant effect on the surrounding area/ecosystem.

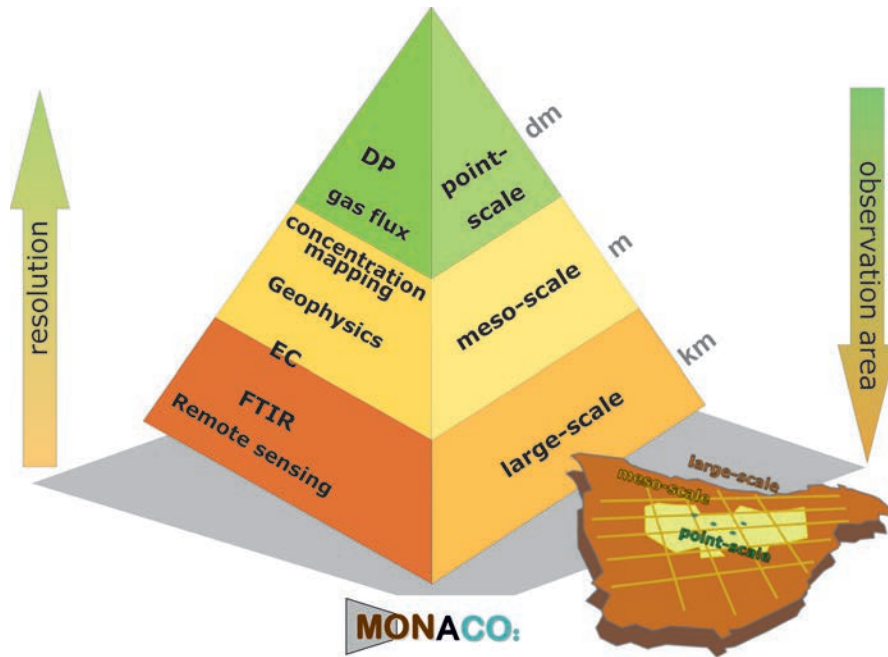


Figure 1: Hierarchical monitoring approach using different methods to monitor CO₂ leakages at different scales

1.1. Large scale atmospheric monitoring

Methods applied at a large scale can provide key information on the occurrence of CO₂ leakage and therefore help identify leakage areas for further meso-scale investigation. The impact on land surface and near-surface atmosphere caused by elevated CO₂ concentrations may alter the spectral reflectance or emissivity characteristics and can be detected using remote sensing techniques. Examples of such techniques include multi- and hyperspectral airborne remote sensing, ground-based remote infrared sensing or laser spectroscopy [8].

Within a CCS site, sensors that can measure atmospheric CO₂ anomalies over open paths hundreds of meters long present an initial impression of leakages and provide the requisite information so that further efficient observations can be made. An interesting potential concept is measuring of absorption loss due to CO₂ concentration along an open optical path [8,9].

Open-path Fourier-transform infrared (OP-FTIR) spectroscopy can be used together with onsite meteorological data to provide an ongoing assessment of quality control and to identify chemical targets in environmental applications in real time. It is a method which has already been widely developed and used [10-12].

This ground-based remote sensing method is proven to be a flexible long-path technique for the characterization of larger areas, able to simultaneously detect various volatile atmospheric compounds with a single rapid measurement. By using passive OP-FTIR spectroscopy with the ability to collect data from any direction, temporal and spatial variations in atmospheric CO₂ concentrations can be identified. However, the source processes of increased concentrations (natural CO₂ sources, anthropogenic influences, and potential storage leakages) in ambient air must be specified with further meso- and point-scale measurements. For more details please refer to another GHGT 11-paper ground based remote

sensing with Open-Path Fourier-Transform Infrared (OP-FTIR) spectroscopy for large-scale monitoring of greenhouse gases by Schütze *et al.*

1.2. Meso-scale atmospheric monitoring

The Eddy Covariance (EC) method is a micrometeorological technique used to measure and determine gas fluxes in the atmospheric boundary layer (surface layer or constant flux layer) at any height above ground surface level. This technique can be applied for the determination of meso-scale CO₂ fluxes. EC is reported as being a promising tool which can be employed to monitor CO₂ leakages at CCS sites and it has been suggested it should be used in CCS monitoring programs [13-15]. In our approach, EC serves mainly as a method used to aid process understanding, helping to provide information on temporal and spatial variations at both large-and meso-scales.

EC technology utilizes highly specialized equipment which requires robust data processing and careful experiment design. For example, a tower needs to be positioned so that it exactly represents an upwind area and be situated within the constant flux area of the boundary layer. The data processing is based on a statistical procedure designed to compute turbulent fluxes of heat, water and gas exchange (e.g. CO₂, CH₄ and trace gases) between the ground surface and near-surface atmosphere, without causing any interference or damage to the ground surface. It can be used to determine an average for the integral flux of gases over larger areas and at different temporal scales [16-18].

However, this method principally depends upon different boundaries (concerning the terrain topography) and as such, it is important to keep in mind that the measured flux rates are a bulk value of all naturally occurring processes. This includes ground-level CO₂ emissions related to microbial CO₂ generation (decomposition of organic matter), plant root respiration and sinks/sources related to photosynthesis (diurnal and annual cycles, farming). Additionally, any (periodic) anthropogenic emission as well as any impact caused by meteorological or atmospheric conditions will affect the measurements. Consequently, the ability of EC technology to detect whether a release of carbon dioxide from a storage site has taken place or not strictly depends on the ratio between the integral CO₂ flux from the footprint area (baseline) and the seepage rate. A seepage rate of 0.1 t/d from a release experiment [16] was not distinguishable from background CO₂ emissions, whereas the release of 0.3 t/d significantly increased the measured flux rates compared to the base line emission rate for the observed area. Results obtained by Lewicki *et al.* [16] indicate that once a leakage signal is detected, EC has the potential to locate and quantify the leakage. However, simultaneous and repeated measurement of a given leakage signal by multiple EC stations with different flux source areas could improve leakage quantification. The application of EC in CCS monitoring programs should be guided by detailed site characterization, careful EC experiment design, and, ideally, the use of complementary measurement techniques [16].

1.3. Meso-scale geophysical monitoring and soil gas surveys

In a monitoring program, deep monitoring techniques (e.g. seismics) are applied to monitor the quantity and migration of CO₂ within a reservoir and adjacent formations, and as such, help contribute to geological site characterization and deliver time-lapse imaging information for CO₂ plume migration. However, our approach focuses on measurements in the near subsurface. Surface-based CO₂ soil gas concentration measurements along with geophysical methods, such as DC geoelectrics, electromagnetic (EMI) and self-potential (SP) measurements, are applied for meso-scale mapping and monitoring of CO₂ spread in the subsurface.

Two main processes can be seen as influencing factors that cause CO₂ degassing into the atmosphere. Firstly, dissolved volatile CO₂ in the pore space has an impact on electrical resistivity due to e.g. formation of carbonic acid or mineral dissolution. Electrical Resistivity Tomography (ERT) and EMI methods are used to image the resistivity distribution of shallow structures down to a depth of 50 m [19-

20]. In this context, the determination of resistivity anomalies is considered to be useful when investigating disturbances caused by variations in lithological parameters and fluid content [21-23].

Secondly, fluid movements through porous media lead to the occurrence of different effects, such as electrokinetic effects and electrochemical potential differences. Such kinds of electrokinetic effects are measured at e.g. hydrothermal systems and volcanoes [e.g.24,25]. Byrdina *et al.* [26] showed that measured SP and ERT results are related to permeable fracture zones serving as preferential pathways for soil gases and water.

The presence of flow and concentration gradients, dissolution effects of volatile CO₂ in groundwater and movements of fluids (CO₂ and H₂O) influence the measured potential differences. Thus, the proposed methods can be used for characterizing fluid flow and transport processes in permeable geological structures and also yields important information on hydraulic properties.

In addition to atmospheric gases, subsurface gases may need to be monitored to consider microbial signal, [3]. Soil-gas surveys are used for the delineation of fault zones and for the characterization of migration process dynamics. Environmental research in geothermal and volcanic areas is used to determine flux rates, which we in turn use to record reliable soil CO₂ degassing rates [27-29] either at the surface or in shallow soil depths.

Soil gas concentration and flux measurement techniques are relatively simple to perform and are valuable methods for monitoring CO₂ seepage along preferential pathways [e.g.30,31]. Long term soil gas measurements at undisturbed locations often show a strong correlation between soil-gas concentrations or fluxes and soil moisture conditions, as well as links to the meteorological situation. Therefore, it should be noted that the analysis of soil-gas concentration and flux data without taking additional external boundary conditions into account is unwise and can lead to misinterpretation.

1.4. Point Scale measurements with Direct Push

High resolution spatial and temporal monitoring of CO₂ leakages requires reliable measurements decoupled from the influence of surface processes. These measurements should be taken as close as possible to the source of the potential leakage. To investigate CO₂ fluxes in the shallow subsurface, it is imperative to perform *in-situ* measurements of CO₂ concentrations, soil permeability and to determine the lithological setting using minimally invasive drilling methods. In this regard, minimally invasive Direct Push Technology (DP), which includes methods or tools used for subsurface investigation by e.g. driving and pushing small diameter steel rods into the ground equipped with sampling tools or probes, can be said to be an ideal way of achieving this aim [32,33]. DP also allows *in-situ* measurement of physical and chemical parameters, as well as the installation of monitoring sensors into depths of up to 20 m with the least possible disturbance to the subsurface[34,35]. Furthermore, due to its flexibility and efficiency, a large number of investigations and installation points can be achieved in a short time. DP is used to investigate the spatial distribution of gas permeability and perform *in-situ* monitoring of the spatial and temporal dynamics of CO₂ concentration and fluxes. Permanent *in-situ* installations enable long-term monitoring. Additionally, isotopic composition analysis can be achieved using gas or water samples, thereby helping to identify CO₂ sources. The concept of *in-situ* measurement of CO₂ fluxes using Direct Push Technology has been successfully applied for the detection of increased radon and CO₂ fluxes at geological fault zones [36]. However, due to its invasive nature, the application of DP technology may be limited as it compromises the physical integrity of the subsurface, e.g. in the direct vicinity of CO₂ injection sites.

4. Joint interpretation

It may be difficult to distinguish between observable CO₂ fluxes originating from leakages in storage formations and background CO₂ fluxes. With the help of FTIR and EC methods, patterns of atmospheric

CO₂ distribution can be observed. Within zones of increased CO₂ concentration, the source processes (man-made, natural) need to be clarified. To achieve this, the subsurface should be monitored in detail, using geophysical methods such as ERT, SP and EMI. Subsequently, the resulting geophysical images which are generated can then be used for selecting suitable profiles for gas flux and concentration measurements. Surface-based measurements of soil CO₂ will help provide more reliable insights, in order to constrain the extent of leakages and to understand the controlling features of the observable fluid flow patterns [36]. Hence, the distribution of geophysical indicators in conjunction with observed characteristic CO₂ concentration and flux patterns is considered useful for identifying particularly important locations. At these locations, detailed investigations with DP can be performed, with the highest temporal and spatial resolution possible (as part of the subsequent level within the framework of the MONACO monitoring concept).

Gas concentration mapping and Direct Push (DP)-based soil-gas sampling is necessary to interpret the permeability of subsurface structures and to examine the spatial and temporal dynamics of CO₂ concentration and fluxes. Consequently, joint data interpretation leads to more reliable models of the investigated structures and processes associated with CO₂ migration and release.

5. Example of validation

Within the scope of this project, the hierarchical concept is tested at naturally-occurring CO₂ release sites in the Czech Republic. The Cheb Basin (NW Bohemia, Czech Republic) is a representative example of a CO₂ leaking natural analogue and offers a perfect location for directly investigating processes along preferential migration paths and for the verification of monitoring tools. Several active tectonic faults and deep processes are responsible for the occurrence of CO₂ in the Cheb Basin, where gas (up to 99.99% CO₂) is ascending via tectonic fault zones directly from the upper mantle to the surface [37]. In this investigation area, both focused small-scale CO₂ degassing sites and larger areas with diffuse degassing behavior are present, providing optimal conditions for evaluating our hierarchical concept (*Fig. 2*).

Using passive OP-FTIR spectroscopy, it was possible to identify zones with higher CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere. These were localized and selected for a detailed investigation. The images generated from our spectral measurements clearly show surface seepage of CO₂ from the soil into the atmosphere (*Fig. 3a*). The Eddy Covariance method is not applicable due to terrain topography and vegetation coverage. Furthermore, CO₂ concentration, CO₂ flux and SP mapping measurements were performed. At zones where higher CO₂ concentrations (60-90%, in a depth of 50 cm) are detectable, SP minima were found (*Fig. 3b/c*). The SP measurements show a strong correlation between CO₂ degassing zones and SP anomalies.

In addition, a geoelectric survey was carried out to provide an image of internal near surface structures to a depth of about 10m (*Fig. 3d*). The ERT results show that site-specific near surface geological features seem to exert great influence upon the degassing pattern. At zones where CO₂ concentration maxima and SP minima (at ground surface level) are detectable, a distinct subsurface resistivity anomaly pattern can be observed, extending from depths in the range 22- 36 m.

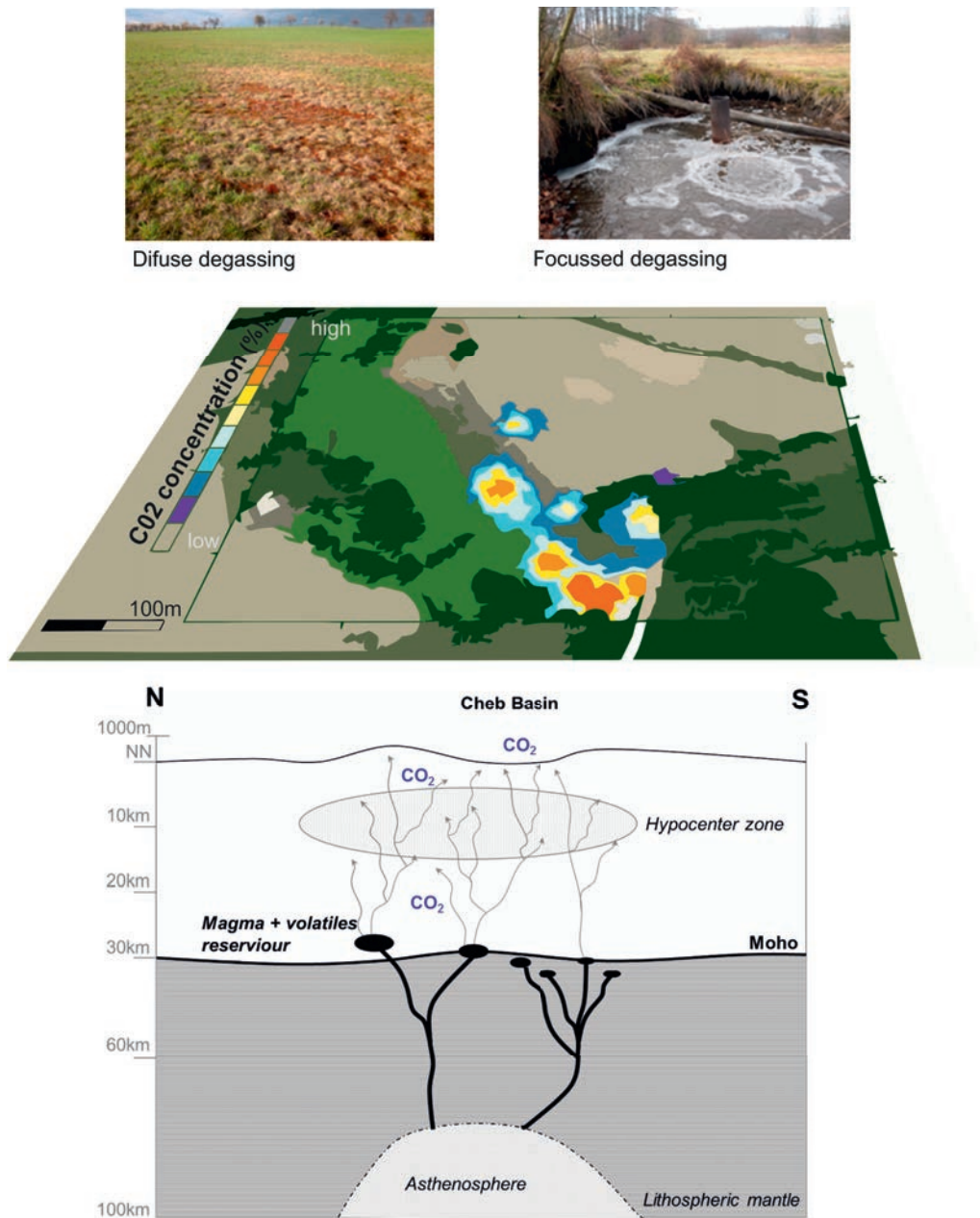


Figure 2: (a) Deep processes are responsible for the occurrence of CO₂ in the Cheb Basin (simplified according to [38]). The gas ascents along tectonic faults into near surface regions and releases into the atmosphere. At ground surface soil gas anomalies are observable by mapping the CO₂ concentration in shallow soil horizons (b) or due to apparent effects at ground surface. Both areas with focused (c) and diffused (d) degassing behavior are observable. Focused degassing is characterized by small-scale vents temporarily filled with meteoric water. At these vents high degassing rates and nearly 100% CO₂ soil gas concentration at ground level are predominantly. Diffused emission is often not obvious, however sometimes distinct vegetation anomalies or indicator plants can be found.

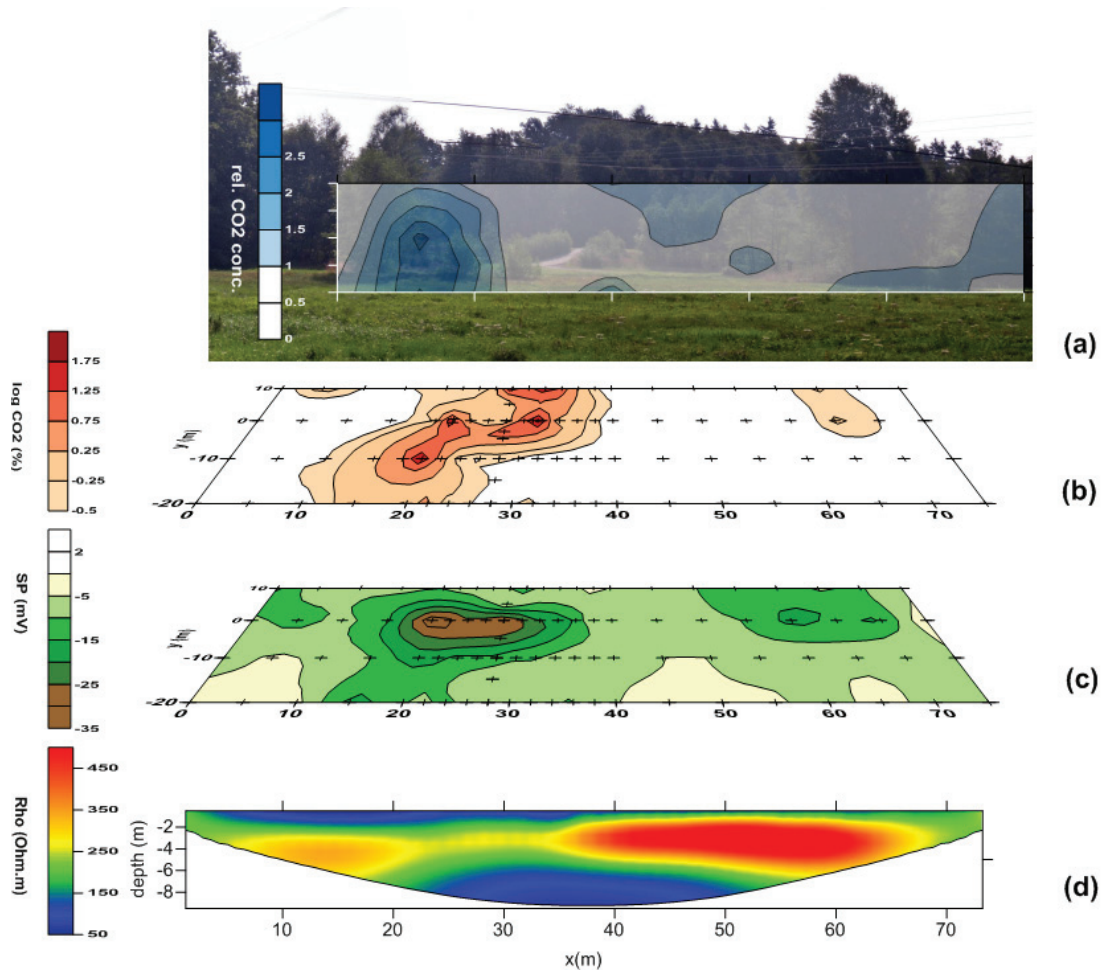


Figure 3 Results of method validation at the natural analogue; a) OP-FTIR spectroscopy scanning image localized zones with higher atmospheric CO₂ concentration, b) soil gas concentration distribution, c) negative SP anomaly correlates with higher CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere and subsurface; d) in the ERT results a distinct anomaly in the resistivity pattern is obvious.

6. Conclusion

- Natural CO₂ deposits represent unique natural analogues for evaluating and validating methods usable for the detection and monitoring of CO₂ migration in the shallow subsurface and seepage into the atmosphere. Natural analogues are characterized by optimal conditions up to critical values to evaluate and validate various monitoring methods. Furthermore, studying natural analogues can facilitate the attainment of valuable information that helps not only improve our understanding of the chemical and physical processes taking place but also provide reliable insights into processes related to CO₂ migration, trapping and leakage at CCS sites.
- The integrative hierarchical monitoring approach based on different levels of coverage and resolution is proposed to reliably detect CO₂ degassing areas and to assess CO₂ leakages from storage formations into the shallow subsurface as well as CO₂ releases into the atmosphere. The combination of large- to point-scale investigations provides the opportunity to efficiently gather information about

the site with rapid effort. Furthermore, it enables a more reliable validation of risk zones using data measured by various methods through a joint interpretation approach.

- The MONACO approach comprises the application of reliable monitoring methods from different disciplines to investigate large scales in an efficient way. The methods include OP-FTIR spectroscopy, geophysics, soil gas analytics and Direct Push technology. The proposed combination is a suitable concept for investigating CO₂ release sites including the option of modularity. Hence, the MONACO approach is expandable with other methods in all scales of coverage at any time (e.g. remote sensing or methods to determine plant stress).
- First promising results achieved from measurements taken at natural analogue sites in the Czech Republic indicate that the hierarchical monitoring approach represents a successfully multidisciplinary modular concept. The application of OP-FTIR spectroscopy in combination with soil gas surveys and geoelectrical investigations have been proven to be a valuable tool for the comprehensive characterization including the atmospheric and near surface CO₂ distribution as well as structural subsurface features

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